

SENATOR MARY MARGARET HAUGEN

Mary Margaret Haugen is a state senator from the 10th Legislative District, representing all of Island County and parts of Snohomish and Skagit counties. Mary Margaret is currently serving her fourth term in Senate; she served five terms in the House of Representatives. Mary Margaret is chair of the Transportation Committee, vice chair of the Special License Review Board, and vice chair of the Legislative Transportation Committee. She serves on the Government Operations and Elections Committee and Rules Committee and is a member of the Municipal Research Council, Transportation Audit Board, Washington State Justice Advisory Board, Office of Public Defense Commission, and the Board on Law Enforcement Training.

Mary Margaret was chair of the House Local Government Committee during the drafting of the Growth Management Act.

In addition to her legislative activity, Mary Margaret is a part of the Camano Island Chamber of Commerce, League of Women Voters, United Methodist Church, Utsalady Ladies Aid, and Eastern Star. She is a past member of the Stanwood School Board. A lifetime resident of Camano Island, Mary Margaret is married to Basil Badley. Together they enjoy their blended family of ten adult children and 37 grandchildren.



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Tape 1, Side 1

Diane Wiatr: This interview with Senator Mary Margaret Haugen is about the history of Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA). The date is July 20, 2005, and the interview is taking place at the Legislative Building in her office in Olympia. My name is Diane Wiatr, and I will be interviewing Senator Haugen today.

Diane: Senator, what interest did you have in growth management before its passage in 1990?

Mary Margaret Haugen: Well, I live on Camano Island, which of course I think is paradise, and anyone who lives on an island recognizes you have limited resources. My district is made up of Island County, which includes Camano and Whidbey Islands and parts of Snohomish and Skagit County. They were beginning to grow at the beginning of 1990 and I think all of us saw that there needed to be some sort of control over that growth. Our counties were developing comprehensive plans—Island County received an award for having an outstanding comprehensive plan, but they didn't pay any attention to it. I could see our quality of life was threatened as a result of not having teeth in our planning laws. There was no force of law to make the locally elected implement their planning.

Diane: Did you hear from your constituents about this?

Mary Margaret: Oh, yes. Again, when you live on an island; you get pretty paranoid when the growth is doubling in a short period of time. The Island is not very big, so when you have 500 people one year and then all of a sudden you have 4,000, that's a lot! We were really seeing the impact locally, and of course people were

saying, “Well, why isn’t the county doing something about this?” “Why aren’t you dealing with issues such as water, education, job opportunities, and traffic?” And “Why are you allowing development to occur” in this place or that?”

Diane: The story goes that Joe King [Speaker of the House of Representatives] was driving on I-405 back to Seattle and the congestion was terrible and that’s when he had this moment, this epiphany that we needed to have growth management in this state. Did you have a moment like that or was it just a buildup of events?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think it was a buildup of events. Certainly those of us who lived in the areas that were growing fast could see what was happening. Also, some of the frustration we had in Olympia was about the communities that were coming to us for help. They had allowed development to occur without planning, and all of a sudden they had this huge problem with overcrowded schools, they had this huge problem with lack of roads, and they turned to the Legislature and said, “We had 300 new people move into this community and they’ve created this big impact on our schools and suddenly we have to build all these buildings.” And to me the Growth Management Act was this message, “Hey folks, you must start planning how to deal with growth.”

Diane: What role did you play in the passage of the GMA? And what group did you represent?

Mary Margaret: I was chair of [the House of Representatives’ committee on] Local Government at that time and my committee was charged with developing the GMA legislation. I was fortunate to have Steve Lundin as my staff person: a wonderful person. This wasn’t the first attempt on growth management, there had been an attempt before, and he had been the staff person at that time.

And so when Joe King asked us to draft legislation, Steve Lundin just happened to have legislation that started to put together the growth management planning process in his files. And so we were able to have a blueprint with us. But as chairman of that committee, we really did draft the original legislation. After it came out of my committee, it was then divided up into the other committees. It was actually my Local Government Committee that put together the beginning of the legislation.

Diane: Which is a good segue way into the Steel Magnolias story perhaps.

Mary Margaret: Well, I think everybody has an interpretation; I think that was the movie that was popular at the time. I still remember it was November, or maybe it was October, but it wasn’t long before the session was going to start and Joe King called the chairmen of all these different committees into his office and said, “We want a Growth Management Act by session.” I knew at the time Steve Lundin did have a draft so it wasn’t alarming for me, but I think all the other chairs went, “Ugh,” and saw it as a real undertaking. But it’s said if you want something done, you ask a woman; if you want someone to give a speech, you ask a man.

I think Joe recognized that he had some very strong leadership in the women who were chairing the committees, or we wouldn’t have been committee chairs. That if anyone was going to do a good job, it would be the women. He was really pretty persistent about us producing something.

Diane: And who coined the phrase “Steel Magnolias?”

Mary Margaret: It was Joe, Joe King. At least that’s what I remember.

Diane: And was it usual to get all those committee chairs together like that?

Mary Margaret: Actually not really, because I served in the Legislature when they put the Public Works Trust Fund together—it was drafted by a group of committee chairs. This group included chairs of the Finance, the Local Government, and State Government Committee—that was certainly not very many committees, but that was a successful format for Joe to follow.

Diane: So, really, the unusual part about it was that it was all women.

Mary Margaret: It was mainly all women, but we had Dick Nelson who was chairman of Energy and he was involved too, so there really was a gentleman involved. Along with Joe and, of course, our staff people.

Diane: And how did you all make this work?

Mary Margaret: Well, as I said, the original legislation was drafted in our committee and then it was divided up with different segments going to the other committees—Economic Development, Natural Resources, Transportation, Energy, and Environmental Affairs and then it came back together in Ways and Means. That's why there were so many people who worked on it, because it really did have many facets.

Diane: And was everybody charged up? What was the feeling at that time of working on this project?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think we were all excited about it. I know that there was a lot of disagreement, more than people realize. Some of us really thought it should be a bottom-up process; that it really needed to come from the community. At that time there were people who were looking at the Oregon model, which would have been state-down goal setting.

We really had a lot of disagreement. I think because Busse Nutley and myself were sort of charged with doing the first cut of it, and we ending up doing a bottom-up process. But we always had a problem with Jennifer Belcher, who always thought it should be the other way around. However, we all agreed that GMA was going to be best for the state and that we needed to make a really strong piece of legislation.

Diane: What is your most interesting memory of the events leading to the enactment of the GMA?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think a lot of people thought we couldn't do it in such a short time frame. I find it interesting that some very controversial issues end up easier than some of the not so controversial issues. I really do think the people of this state were ready for something because, like I said, so much was going on and there was no real planning and no laws to back it up.

There were comprehensive plans, but nobody was paying any attention to them. One of the things that was going on that a lot of people didn't realize is that there was not much communication between cities and counties. In fact, there was a great deal of conflict between the two. Now it's not uncommon to bring the cities and counties up to testify together at a legislative hearing—in those days, you could never have done that.

I feel on my part, one of the things that I wanted to happen, and I think is one of the best things that came out of the Growth Management Act, was to get the cities and counties to sit down and start talking together. That's—everybody will say, even opponents will say—what was really important about the Growth Management Act, is that the cities and counties started planning together.

Diane: Name the five most important successes of the GMA. You told us this one of cities and counties communicating...

Mary Margaret: Well, I guess that's one, and also defining that cities and counties needed to start recognizing what the needs are to going to be for regional population growth. You saw them beginning to plan for taking care of water and sewer, roads, and schools; certainly that was positive. Plus, I think it was a really good opportunity for the community to feel like they were taking control of their own destiny. Before the GMA was created, public meetings were generally held after the plans were created. The GMA turned the process around, and the public meetings are now held before the plan is developed—that is the bottom-up process that was so important to many.

Diane: So you think that the GMA has helped inspire additional public participation in Washington.

Mary Margaret: No question about it! In the planning process there were those who wanted to be included—but others wanted no part of it—namely the ports—so all special districts were removed in the Senate.

Many special districts all wish they had been included; I take great glee out of the fact when they come to me to say, “We really wish we had been part of the process.” But everybody, at least in local government, was sort of frightened about their turf and their territory, in the case of the ports it was their taxing authority. I think one of the things the Growth Management Act has done is really clarify who does what as far as services are concerned. They’re sort of complex, but I think people really understand what their role is. Some special districts have had to fight to continue serving their constituents because they were not a part of the planning process.

Diane: Do you think you can see some of the positive outcomes of the GMA in your community on Camano Island?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think some of the people I represent feel like it hasn’t worked enough because of the growth, however, we have the strongest vesting laws in the nation and we really couldn’t go back and erase the lines—much of the land has already been divided up—it had already been subdivided into small parcels of land. What it did do though was, it stopped the growth long enough for the county to realize that there needed to be enough potable water on the islands to handle the growth.

Potable water is the big issue in my area, and building could not occur until they upgraded their water systems. It helped prevent building where there were inadequate services—critical areas and prime farmlands. We’re seeing some of that growth occur now because they’ve upgraded the systems. It did put growth on hold in a lot of areas.

Diane: And what shorelines have been affected by the Growth Management Act?

Mary Margaret: Well, the Shoreline Management Act was already in place, so that didn’t play as big of a role. In my district, I think probably the most significant thing that happened in my district was it really helped to preserve the farmland in Skagit County.

I have to give my Skagit County commissioners a lot of credit, they really drew a line in the sand and said, “This is going to remain farmland and this is not going to be encroached upon.” And they’ve been very proactive in preserving that farmland through a lot of tools that have been passed since that time. I do think the Growth Management Act did preserve the farmland. As much as farmers have problems with it, most of them acknowledge that had it not been for those plans—for the ability to draw those growth boundaries—we’d have lost farmland in Skagit County.

Diane: Some of those beautiful landscapes...

Mary Margaret: The Growth Management Act has worked better in Skagit County than anywhere else as far as the preservation of farmland. The commissioners realized that growth needed to occur in the city and on the hillside, and that’s where it is occurring, and the farmland has been preserved. And it’s because of the regional commitment of those commissioners. It was very tough for them, and some would even say they lost their jobs over their actions.

I remember someone saying there would be very few locally elected officials left in office, after they went through the GMA process. This was because what the commissioners had to do, they had to plan—they knew how to do it, but they’d never had to implement it. Now they had to implement it under the Growth Management Act. It’s one thing to plan and tell people this is going to happen, but it’s another thing to regulate

them to do it. Many, many elected officials, after they went through the process, were not re-elected, but they did the right thing.

Diane: How has the GMA evolved?

Mary Margaret: Well, one of the things that I tried to do in the many years that I served as chair of Local Government in the House was to try to preserve it. Not make a lot of changes—from my observation in the Legislature, one of our biggest problems is we keep changing the rules all the time before laws get implemented. And so my goal as chairman of that committee was not to allow a lot of amendments to occur in those first years. The original bill did not have the growth hearings board in it, and I think if there's a flaw, that's probably what the flaw would be. I was not involved in putting together that particular process. That was done through leadership, and there were a lot of negotiations that went on to appease the different areas of the state. But I really think we'd have been better off if we had one court of law to deal with it instead of having three sets of hearing boards.

What we envisioned originally was that there needed to be a board where cities and counties could go who had conflicts and where citizens could go without an attorney and try to come to a solution. And it turned out more like a court of law, with attorneys, and being very costly. I think that's been one of my disappointments.

I think something that probably disturbed me more than anything was the lack of creativity from local government. We envisioned there'd be a lot of different plans and they'd all be unique to their own area, but what we saw right from the start was local government coming and saying, "We need more direction, we need more direction."

So legislation passed to give them more direction. I'd really hoped there'd be more individuality and more creativity and that there wouldn't be cookie-cutter planning, but we are seeing in some places a lot of cookie-cutter planning and regulations.

Diane: Do you think that's because there's something of a template from CTED?

Mary Margaret: Local government seems to forget they asked for more direction and they got it. One of the things they used to say early on is that there would be some poor planning if we didn't give more direction, but do people really want to live in a community with poor planning? I didn't think so. That was the difference between my feelings towards local control and some of my colleagues, who wanted to give more direction.

Diane: And what do you think could be done to inspire more creativity in planning?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think it's a little late now at least, to some degree, but I do think we need to encourage jurisdictions to take a look at trying to reach out to more folks and get them involved, and then trying to meet with some of the people who've been offended by it. In my community right now, we have a real conflict going on—in fact, I met yesterday with some people considered extreme by a lot of folks—environmental folks that sued my county over growth management—because of the critical areas ordinances. People are very, very upset, and there is a lot of frustration by a lot of citizens. I think that this could have been avoided had the county reached out to that group and tried to compromise, but it's turned out to be a them-against-us fight. I've gone to all these public hearings they've held, and people on both sides of the issue are all standing up saying, "We want to preserve the quality of life and the rural environment." When both the county and the environmental groups are saying the same thing about exactly the same thing—Why don't they work together to do it instead of trying to fight it out in court? That's been another disappointment.

Diane: How do you think that situation could be resolved?

Mary Margaret: I wish there'd been more of a mediation role for the growth boards. I know they're trying to do that now, but early on it was sort of cut and dry. I really would have preferred a mediation role.

Diane: You've been involved in the Legislature for a long time now, can you give some examples of how the GMA is working at the local level?

Mary Margaret: I think that the most positive aspect is what I said early on—that cities and counties are working together.

Diane: Can you cite some specific cities or counties where you've seen this?

Mary Margaret: Well, in my own community, where the cities and counties are actually working together and talking about how to provide needed services. As I said, when I was chairman of Local Government, they wouldn't even come to the same meetings without a big fight. But I've seen the cities and counties come to the table together because they've started to work together on growth management issues, they're together on other issues like law enforcement—water rights—social services—and a very good example is their efforts together on mental health issues.

Diane: Why do you think the GMA became law?

Mary Margaret: Well, it became law because the House was Democratic and the Senate was Republican. We had good leadership in both Joe King and Jeannette Hayner, and both of them, to some degree, were visionaries. I think they recognized the fact that growth was going to occur, and if local governments didn't begin to start planning for it that they were going to get more calls coming to them as leaders saying, "You've got to give us some money to help me solve this problem in my community." I think the legislators at that time recognized that growth was going to occur in the state of Washington and the infrastructure wasn't going to keep up unless we had some planning in place that was really going to stick so that we could plan how to pay for it, and have the infrastructure in place.

Diane: And do think that there was just one specific moment in time where everything came together and it worked, or do you think it was inevitable?

Mary Margaret: Well, I think it was inevitable, however we had really strong leaders at the right time who made both parties do it in a nonpartisan way because it really was a nonpartisan issue. It wasn't much of an East-West issue, either—I think we have real struggles now with East-West more than we did at that point. In fact, part of our work in the original bill was to encourage growth in rural areas too because the urban areas had no more room, which didn't happen because the infrastructure wasn't and isn't there. Not because there wouldn't be opportunity, but because we hadn't made the investment. Many of our rural counties at that time saw it as an opportunity to be able to improve economic development.

Diane: Can you speak a little bit about Jeannette Hayner's role because she's not able to speak to us, but we'd like to hear a little bit about what she did.

Mary Margaret: Well, Jeannette was an extraordinarily wise woman. She came from Walla Walla, which is an area that, although it had growth problems at that time, a lot of people would not consider a high-growth area. But I think she was a bit of a visionary, she was a very strong leader in a time when women were not necessarily in leadership roles in the Legislature—many of us chaired committees, but we didn't have many women who were in leadership roles. She was a tough negotiator and she was willing to negotiate on growth management. She played a key role, as much as Joe King. I've often said we wouldn't have a Growth Management Act

without Joe King, because he prodded us to do the work, but I do think Jeannette was equally as important. I was in the House [of Representatives] at the time, and I didn't work with Jeannette a lot. I know she's the one that kept her caucus focused on the issue. She had some people in her caucus at that time who were not very supportive, but she told them, "We will do this, you will do it."

Diane: The story goes that she had the integrity and made people keep their promises.

Mary Margaret: Oh, no question about it. She did, she made a deal and she was going to keep it, and her caucus was going to work with her to help her keep her word; she made her caucus look good.

One of the problems in this place is that people don't always remember when they have made an agreement. One of the things that I did as chairman was to ask that people sign a paper, and I still have that paper, when we all agreed to language in the act. I wanted to be able to remind the people at the table they had agreed to the language. In particular, the homebuilders sometimes are difficult to deal with after they've left the table and they've had their input. One of the things that we heard from the building and construction industry at that time was predictability was what they wanted. And what the Growth Management Act really hoped to achieve was some predictability—we knew where growth was going to occur, how much it would cost you to build in those growth areas.

That's what we were trying to achieve; now whether we've achieved it or not, I think people will have different opinions. I do think it's working. I really do think it's working. I think we're finally seeing some success, certainly within the urban growth boundary. We are seeing higher density—people grumble about that—we knew this would happen—but there are greenbelts around developments to help mitigate some of the concerns. The idea was not to totally limit the growth—but to grow from the center out. This makes providing services much more cost effective.

So, I don't believe we thought about certain kinds of social conflicts at the time that would occur. Last year we had a bill, which kind of tugged at my heart; it came from a Seattle area community that was being forced to take a higher density. The homes were on larger lots that could be divided or become apartment housing and they wanted to keep the integrity of their community. I really believed that the Growth Management Act was never intended to force communities to change because of the density but it's happening. I am sad about this and think we should clarify this—but the builders and realtors oppose restricting the cities' and counties' ability to rezone for higher density.

Diane: Do you have any additional comments or anything else you'd like to say?

Mary Margaret: Well, I would like to make a comment that I've made to many people, I think we were unrealistic in our time frames. The Legislature continues to pass bills year after year, and I don't think we realize how much work it was going to be for local government and how much it was going to cost. I think we put unrealistic time frames in the GMA by having such short time frames; it caused some of the conflict to occur because decisions had to be made in order to meet the timeline. I think if we'd been more realistic on time, it would have been better for everybody involved. Now, one of the things that local governments say is, "We need more time, we need more time." But we've locked ourselves into some pretty unrealistic timeframes, and I think that needs to be corrected. We also never funded the GMA like we promised so it has become a major unfunded mandate.

I also want to go on record to say that the agreed intent of the GMA was to deal with future growth and new development. It never was the intention of those who put it together for the GMA to be used to regulate

existing land use! We knew then and know today that we have other laws that deal with many of the issues that some people are trying to use the GMA to regulate.

Diane: I have one last question. Some people I've interviewed have said that working on the GMA is probably one of their highlights of their careers. Do you feel that way at all?

Mary Margaret: Well, it certainly was—however, I've had a lot of highlights in my career. It certainly was something that was important to me, because I was envisioning what my community would look like in the future. Our farmlands were vanishing and our rural areas were changing rapidly. I live where my grandparents lived—my grandchildren are fifth generation, and I'd like to think I had something to do with them living the same quality of life that I've experienced, although it's changing very rapidly. So I do get a certain amount of satisfaction out of that. But I will say that because of my work on the GMA, it's made it easier for me to understand some of the other issues we deal with. Like now—my role in transportation—that was a real weakness in growth management. We didn't really fund the infrastructure like we should have, and we have not seen the economic development needed in some of the rural areas as we struggle with growth in Central Puget Sound.

Diane: Thank you.